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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 002157

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/26/2015

TAGS: [PTER PHUM CE LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL: ASSASSINATION OF
PRO-TIGER MP IN THE EAST FOLLOWED BY MINE ATTACK ON ARMY
CONVOY IN THE NORTH

REF: A. USDAO COLOMBO IIR 6 816 0031 06
[B](#). COLOMBO 2149
[C](#). COLOMBO 2118
[D](#). COLOMBO 2108
[E](#). USDAO COLOMBO IIR 6 816 0032 06

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Following two consecutive Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacks on the Sri Lanka Navy in the northern district of Mannar on December 22 and 23 (Refs A and B), the violence continues in the north and east with no respite for the holiday. Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP Joseph Pararajahsingham was shot and killed by suspected members of the dissident Karuna faction while attending Christmas Mass in Batticaloa, and the LTTE detonated another claymore mine under a Sri Lanka Army (SLA) transport vehicle, killing 10 soldiers. Pro-LTTE media, meanwhile, has launched a public relations offensive against Government security forces, attempting to depict "occupying" soldiers as human rights violators and "reporting" popular indignation at their purported depredations. End summary.

CARNAGE AFTER COMMUNION

[1](#)2. (U) Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP Joseph Pararajahsingham was shot and killed while attending midnight Christmas Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral in the eastern district of Batticaloa. The 71-year-old MP was reportedly shot nine times as he returned from receiving Communion; his wife and seven other church-goers standing near him at the time of the attack were injured. It is unclear whether the others were shot by Pararajahsingham's assailant, who escaped the scene, or the security detail assigned to the MP.

[1](#)3. (SBU) According to local sources, Pararajahsingham traveled infrequently to Batticaloa, the troubled, turbulent epicenter of the ongoing struggle for supremacy between Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) militants and members of the dissident Karuna faction, because of fears that his well-known pro-LTTE sympathies would make him a target in the tit-for-tat violence. Although a previously unknown group called the "Sennan Brigade" has claimed it carried out the attack, it is widely assumed that the anti-LTTE Karuna faction is responsible for the assassination. (Comment: And it is also widely assumed, including among members of the diplomatic community, that the Karuna faction receives some degree of Government support.) A faxed letter to the Ambassador from LTTE ideologue S.P. Tamilselvan, dated December 25, blamed "the Sri Lankan military and the armed groups that work with them" for this "most despicable act." Military sources, on the other hand, were quoted in the local press on December 27 attempting to pin the attack on the LTTE.

[1](#)4. (C) The pro-LTTE website TamilNet reported on December 25 that Tiger supremo Prabhakaran, declaring Pararajahsingham's death a "great tragedy in the history of the Tamil Eelam freedom struggle," had bestowed the LTTE's highest honor ("Maamanithar" or "great man") posthumously on the late MP. The Tigers had reportedly taken Pararajahsingham's body to LTTE-controlled territory in Batticaloa, where, at least according to TamilNet, grief-stricken crowds turned out to pay their respects. The mood will be significantly different during the funeral in government-controlled Batticaloa town, however, an American Jesuit priest with decades of experience in the eastern district predicted to polo off. Pararajahsingham's blatant pro-LTTE stance made him unpopular with the local population, the cleric asserted, observing that the MP had not won an election since 2000. (Note: He lost in the general elections of 2004 but made it into Parliament as a Member appointed to the "national list," a quota system based on the

number of popular votes a party gains in an election.) Commenting that such bloodshed has long been the norm in Batticaloa, the Jesuit expressed skepticism that the police would investigate the killing. Instead, he said, local authorities, seemingly abiding by the rubric "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," have no apparent interest in pursuing killers of LTTE members or sympathizers, and are not pushed by their superiors to do so either.

MORE CLAYMORES IN JAFFNA

15. (SBU) At about 12:40 p.m. local time on December 27, a command-detonated claymore mine weighing as much as 30 kg exploded beneath a bus carrying Sri Lanka Army (SLA) personnel along a main road in the northern district of Jaffna, killing 10 soldiers and wounding four. SLA soldiers reportedly had already cleared the road before the bus began plying the route. Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) Jaffna representative Jorn Asplund told poloff that as a safety precaution SLMM monitors are no longer traveling during daylight hours along the three main roads used by the SLA in Jaffna. This latest attack brings the death toll of government security forces to more than 40 since the beginning of the month.

LTTE ON PROPAGANDA OFFENSIVE

16. (SBU) Many observers have speculated that Pararajasingham's slaying might have been in retaliation for unprovoked LTTE attacks on Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) personnel in the northwestern district of Mannar on December 22 and 23 (Refs A and B) that killed between 13-16 sailors. The LTTE, perhaps feeling the sting of international criticism for its chronic and all-too-deadly ceasefire violations, seems to be doing its best recently to paint the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and its security forces as heinous human rights abusers. Pro-LTTE media are attempting to depict Tiger-instigated protests in Jaffna as popular uprisings against the "occupying" forces, while stoking popular indignation and suspicion after the discovery of the body of a young woman, who had been raped and mutilated, near a naval base in the same district (Ref C). Following a firefight between SLA troops and suspected LTTE cadres at Jaffna Fort on December 24, TamilNet claimed that five putative LTTE casualties from that exchange brought to Jaffna Hospital by the SLA were really innocent Tamils killed elsewhere and dumped by the Army at the Fort. On Christmas Day TamilNet posted grisly pictures of the bullet-riddled corpses, including one of a young woman.

17. (SBU) The same day TamilNet also alleged that GSL security forces set fire to a Tamil settlement near the site of the December 23 attack on SLN sailors in Mannar (Ref A), killing four civilians, including a four-year-old child. Embassy attempts to determine the credibility of that report so far have proven inconclusive. On December 27 the National Human Rights Commission told us it was unable to send officers to that part of Mannar to investigate, while the SLMM Spokesman said the case was still under investigation. The General Secretary of the nonpartisan Mannar Citizens' Committee told POL FSN on December 27 that GSL security forces had raided and looted homes in the area following the attack on the sailors, prompting 400 people to flee and seek refuge in a nearby church. He alleged that the four who perished in the fire were the only ones in the settlement who had not left by the time security forces arrived. Rayappu Joseph, Catholic Bishop of Mannar, also blamed the security forces for the deaths. The Mannar Government Agent was out of the district and could not be reached for comment.

COMMENT

18. (C) Since the Karuna faction broke away from the LTTE in March 2004, there have been nearly daily assassinations, counter-killings and assorted other violations of the Ceasefire Agreement (except for a brief moratorium following the tsunami last year) that have inured the local population, especially in the east, to a certain level of violence. Up until late this year, however, the violence had been largely Tamil-on-Tamil, a situation that made it all too easy for the Government and the Sinhalese south to ignore the persistent bloodshed. Since late November, however, the LTTE appears to have made a decision to take the fight, albeit on a small scale, to the Government. The reappearance of coffins bearing the remains of ambushed soldiers and sailors back to their villages in the south will put increasing pressure on a

new and untested government that won the election by appealing to Sinhalese chauvinist sentiment. To date, GSL security forces have demonstrated commendable restraint in not reacting to LTTE onslaughts. As the pressure--and the body count--mount, however, it will become increasingly difficult to maintain this restraint.

19. (C) Comment (cont.): Pararajasingham has been an Embassy contact since he was first elected to Parliament (as a Tamil United Liberation Front MP) in 1994. He last visited the Embassy on December 15 when he called on the Ambassador, along with other TNA MPs, with a predictably pro-LTTE apologia for the recent attacks on GSL security forces. As noted by our Jesuit contact, this elderly politician was not popular with his own putative constituency and presented little threat to anti-LTTE forces. In a conflict that has spanned two decades and seen countless horrific abuses of basic human rights by both sides, this murder in a cathedral at Christmas may present a new low.

LUNSTEAD